[Mr. George Richmond]

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Smith.

Francis Donovan

Thomaston

Wednesday, Nov. 30 '38

Unable to locate Mr Richmond today I called at the home of Miss Emma Blakeslee to return the material borrowed on the old history of the clock industry, and while [?] there had a [?] lengthy conversation with Mr. Charles Smith, a boarder, and an employe of the Seth Thomas Company. Mr. Smith questioned me [?] about the work and [?] evinced considerable interest in it. I asked him to give me his impressions of the life of the town during [?] the early days of his employment with the company. He has worked steadily at Seth Thomas [?] for thirty-seven years, and though he does not by his own admission consider himself an "old-timer," he comes very close to the classification, and he has seen during his lifetime changes in the social and economic structures more significant and sweeping than any which took place perhaps in all history. Here is his reaction to my statement that virtually all of the old men interviewed to date had expressed the belief that the “old days” were “better”:

“There's a lot in it. You have to allow for the fact that most any man thinks the days when he was a young sprig were [?] the best ever, but still there's a lot in it.

“How do you suppose the people got along in times past here? Think they had an easy time? There wasn't any [?] relief in those days—of course I'll admit it wasn't [?] the same

kind of problem it is now—but still nobody did very much for them. They just pinched and scraped, and got by somehow, without asking for charity.

“I'll tell you one thing, the women in those days were better managers. They knew how to stretch a dollar. They knew how to buy. The butcher and the grocer didn't put anything over on them, and they got the most for their money all along the line.

2

“They knew how to cook, too. They couldn't always get the best cuts of meat, but if they had to get cheaper cuts, they could cook it so's it tasted just as good. There's ways of cooking, if you know how. Of course, they bought things cheaper too. Most everything was bought in bulk, and that's the way they could save. Most of 'em made their own bread; they'd buy flour by the barrel; milk they'd have delivered same as it is now, but some took it by the pail.

“I don't think there was as much milk [?] bought in those days, though, as there is now. They'd feed it only to babies; grown people and older children wouldn't bother with it.

“Meat could be bought a good deal cheaper. There [?] were several slaughter-houses around; one of them up by the old White Lily Pond off the Torrington road. The farmers'd bring their cattle and pigs down there and have 'em slaughtered and then [?] they'd go around from house to house selling meat.

“Liquor? Well, there were four or five saloons in town, but they were run pretty carefully. There wasn't any of them what you might call a dive. And I don't think there was [?] as much drinking going on then as there is now. There were always drunkards, of course, same as there is today; but I think there /[?] [?] a bigger percentage of total abstainers than there is today, too.

“Women, for instance, didn't touch it. And they didn't have much use for a man that drank. When you went to one of the old fancy balls at the Opera House , for instance, if you took a snort beforehand you had to go to a lot of trouble to conceal it.

“Some of the boys used to tank up before [t?] they went to call for their girls, but they always had to get some sen-sen, or some kind ofseed they used to sell, to disguise the odor of liquor. And of course if you took any of that stuff, the smell of it on your breath was a dead give-away that you'd been drinking.

3

“That old Opera House used to be going every night in the week, pretty near, during the winter season. I guess some of them must have told you about the big shows they used to have there. (“And if [t?] it wasn't a show, it would be some kind of a fair, or a ball. The fire department would give them, and the Odd Fellows, and St. Thomas' church, [a??] and the Foresters, and the Masons. and the G A.R. The masons used to give one that was always the highlight of the season. (“I tell you, a ‘Ball’ used to be something. About a month before the thing was held, you'd [?] see cards around in all the store windows, advertising it. And if you were going to take a lady, you had to ask her just as soon as these posters appeared, because she always had to [v?] get a new dress and go to a lot of trouble for the big affair. [?] “And you had to be slicked up pretty well yourself too, and put your best foot forward. You'd have to hire a hack, if you were doing the thing right, and you'd have to speak for that a few weeks in advance if you wanted to be sure of getting it.

“When the [g?] big night came, you got your bouquet of flowers from the florist, and with your dancing pumps [?] wrapped in a paper [p?] parcel in your inside coat pocket, you called on the lady in your hired hack.

“You'd get down to the Opera House just before eight, it wasn't stylish to be late in those days; and when you got there, you'd escort your [ladyx?] girl as far as the ladies' room, and [s??] leave her there, and then you'd join the other lads in the gents' room, and put

on your dancing pumps. Then you'd go back and wait—you'd always have to wait—while she finished primping, and when she came out you'd escort her to a seat, and wait for the grand march to be called.

“No, the boys didn't [we?] wear evening clothes, but you had to have a white vest. Maybe the whole night, [bo?] bouquet, and hack and tickets 4 of admission and all, would cost you four or five dollars. Usually, the dance would break up at midnight, because all the lights in town went out the.n. Sometimes, [?] for the bigger affairs, they'd notify the Power House to keep the current on until one. But they always had to pay for that extra hour of electricity. Always had a big orchestra. Billy Hanley used to play for a lot of them. He had a ten piece outfit.

“Yes, four or five dollars was a lot of money but it was worth it. Nobody got big money. Yet they all raised big families and a lot of them managed to save money and buy their homes. They did without things. Kids didn't have any money to spend. [?] Didn't know what money looked like.

“You got about two dollars a day in the shop. If you went piece work sometimes you could make as high as two-seventy, but at that they began to cut you. But as I said, life was a lot less complicated. Nobody had very [?] much and they never thought they were doing without things they ought to have. It was just accepted as a matter of course.

“If you were flush of a Sunday, you took your best girl out riding in a hired rig. Cost you two and a half for the day, and you were lucky to get one, because they were in big demand. If you wanted a rig for a holiday, like Decoration Day, or Labor day, you had to ask for it about three weeks ahead of time.

“There were [g?] three livery stables here, and they were going all the time. Some of the [?] young sports around town owned their own horses, but not many. You couldn't do it on shop pay. Everybody walked. They came to work from Reynolds Bridge, and way up on the Fenn road, and from over on the East Side, and thought nothing of it. Some

of them walked miles every day. When I was working in the watch shop, I lived over on the East Side, over [o?] on Prospect street. It used to take me twenty [?] minutes to walk home, twenty minutes to eat my dinner and twenty minutes to walk 5 back. No time to rest after dinner. We worked ten hours a day [a?] and nine on Saturdays. Afterwards we got Saturday afternoon off. But you always had work. When things got a little slack [a??] you went to the boss [a? and told him you were caught up, and he'd say, ‘Well, make a little stock! They didn't let anybody go, that is not the way they do now, and you didn't see the men out of work you do in these days. But nowadays they won't make stock. Don't want to take a chance with it.”